

# **Spring Tips for Food Safety**

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As spring arrives we tend to start having picnics and barbeques. Keeping food safe can become an issue if we don't follow some simple food handling guidelines.

1. Temperature is something that can be controlled and influences the growth of bacteria and other food pathogens. Foods that contain protein, water, and are neutral to basic in pH are ideal for bacterial growth (some examples include meats, cheeses, potato salad, cream dips, some macaroni salads, beans, sliced fruits). When these foods are allowed to stay between 40-140 degrees F for periods of time greater than 4 hours, food borne illness can result. In general refrigerated foods should be kept cold (less than 40 degrees F) and cooked foods should be kept hot (greater than 140 degrees F). During outdoor events we sometimes overlook these simple facts and allow foods to spoil. Be aware of how long foods are left in the danger temperature range as well as the temperature of foods during storage.
2. Food handling is also an important part of food safety. Cross contamination between raw foods and ready to eat foods can result in food borne illness. An example of this circumstance would be using similar utensils to cut raw meat and then salad items. Vegetables serve as a transport media for the bacteria in the meat. Because the Vegetables will not be cooked the bacteria are not destroyed and are consumed. Salmonella is an example of a bacteria transported in this way. Utensils should always be washed prior to use on different types of foods or separate utensils should be designated for the different items. People preparing food should also be aware of hygiene. Several food borne illnesses are the result of food contamination by people. Hand washing is a good way to control this circumstance.
3. Proper cooking is essential to prevent disease associated from raw meats. Hamburger should be cooked thoroughly. Hamburger has surfaces of meat that have been ground together. Bacteria can only be destroyed if all surfaces are raised to the appropriate temperatures. Eating hamburger that is still pink can result in food borne illness. Pork and chicken are also examples of meat that must be cooked thoroughly. Most meat packaging labels contain cooking instructions

due to the risks associated with improperly cooked meats. Also buying meats that have been gamma irradiated significantly lowers the risks associated with bacteria and parasites in raw meat.

4. Insects also present a food hazard when outdoors. Flies due to their feeding habits tend to carry bacteria. When these insects land on food items they can transmit these bacteria to the food. This can result in food borne illness especially if coupled with poor temperature control.

Food illness can often be controlled during preparation and storage. With proper care we can reduce the risk of illness due to food infections or intoxications.

For more information please contact the Peninsula Branch food safety section.